



News Release

PRESS OFFICE

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SBA Honors Outstanding Disaster Recovery Efforts

ATLANTA – Two Mississippi residents— the director of a chamber of commerce and a radio broadcaster who provided much needed services after Hurricane Katrina struck, and a Florida small business owner who managed to rebuild his business in spite of three hurricanes that devastated the state two years ago, will be presented with the Phoenix Award on April 13 during the U.S. Small Business Administration's *National Small Business Week*, the agency's two-day conference in Washington.

The awards will be presented during a 9 a.m. breakfast at the Ronald Reagan International Center.

"These individuals displayed tremendous courage and selflessness in the midst of the most devastating disasters in U.S. history," said SBA Administrator Hector V. Barreto. "The Phoenix Award is an acknowledgment of their heroic efforts, and a token of appreciation for their support of the physical and economic recovery efforts in the Gulf Coast and Florida."

Letitia H. Williams, Executive Director of the Hancock County Chamber of Commerce, will receive the Phoenix Award for *Outstanding Contributions to Disaster Recovery by a Public Official*. After the Hancock County Chamber of Commerce offices were destroyed when Hurricane Katrina struck, Williams met with state officials and asked for help. She acquired a temporary space for the chamber, secured Internet access, computers and phones, and found benefactors—other chambers of commerce nationwide— to "adopt" Hancock County and assist in the rebuilding of the county's business infrastructure. Despite losing her home, Williams worked tirelessly, helping local businesses take the first steps toward recovery.

James N. Hough, President of Rehab Health Partners, of Lakeland, Florida, will receive the Phoenix Award for *Small Business Disaster Recovery*. Jim Hough's business took a beating when three major hurricanes hit Central Florida two years ago. The damage to his roof paled in comparison to the economic destruction caused by power failures and the loss of other basic services, which created major hardships for Hough. Despite losing revenue and his client base, Hough fought to keep his employees paid and his business alive. Rehab Health Partners is now seeing profits, and Hough was able to keep all 14 employees.

Brice Phillips, of WQRZ Radio will receive the Phoenix Award for his *Outstanding Contributions to Disaster Recovery by a Volunteer*. As Hurricane Katrina approached the Mississippi Coast, Brice Phillips loaded his van with transmitters and extra antennas and relocated WQRZ radio to the county's emergency operations center. As the storm surge waters reached the building's second level, Phillips braved the elements and rigged his car batteries to power the station's broadcasting of search and rescue information. WQRZ was one of only four Gulf Coast radio stations that stayed on the air in the early days after Katrina struck.

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Since 1998, the SBA has presented the Phoenix Awards to business owners and individuals who displayed courage, resourcefulness and tenacity in the aftermath of a disaster, while contributing to the rebuilding of their communities.

The SBA makes low-interest, taxpayer-backed disaster loans to homeowners, renters, and businesses of all sizes. In the aftermath of last year's Gulf Coast hurricanes, the SBA has approved more than \$7.7 billion in disaster loans to about 115,000 hurricane survivors, the largest response in the agency 53-year history.

Homeowners may borrow up to \$200,000 to repair disaster damaged residences. Homeowners and renters are eligible for loans of up to \$40,000 to replace personal property. Loans of up to \$1.5 million are available to businesses of all sizes and non-profit organizations to repair damage to real estate, machinery and inventory. Economic Injury Disaster Loans of up to \$1.5 million are available to small businesses unable to pay bills or meet operating expenses.

To find out more about the SBA's disaster assistance program and details on hurricane recovery, visit the Web site at http://www.sba.gov/disaster_recov/hurricanes.

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